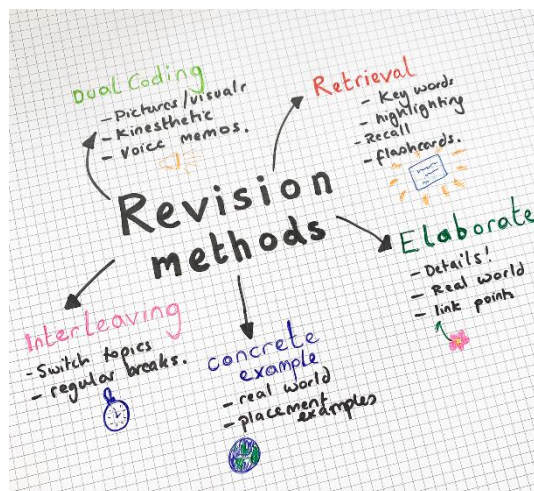


A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH REVISION

As your child prepares for their exams, you can play a crucial role in helping them succeed with revision. This leaflet is designed to outline some of the key research around revision and explain how you can use this to support your child.



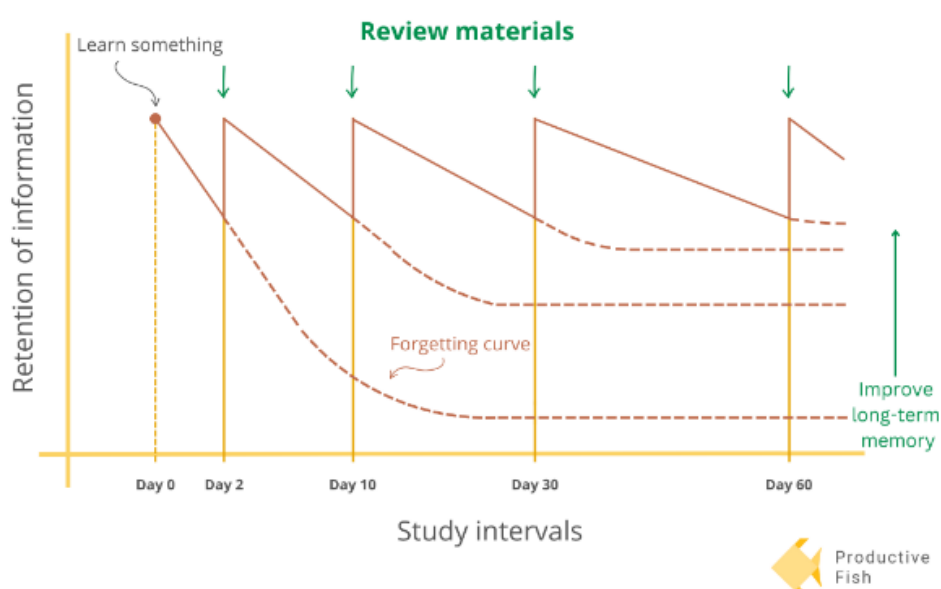
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The forgetting curve.

Research shows that immediately after we have learned something, we start to forget it. This was demonstrated in some research carried out by Hermann Ebbinghaus in the 1880s (and replicated more recently by other researchers like Murre and Dros, 2015). There are several factors that affect this loss of memory, including stress, sleep and the difficulty of the material being learned.

It is possible to overcome the forgetting curve using a technique called spaced practice (sometimes called distributed practice). This technique is much more effective than massed practice (also known as cramming).

The graph below shows Ebbinghaus' forgetting curve and how **distributed practice** can help improve long-term memory. You can see that each time the materials are reviewed, the retention of information increases.



What does this mean for my child?

Revision works best if we space the learning out over time rather than cramming it in close to the examination. Learning things once doesn't mean we will remember it a day, a week or a month later – we need to return to information we have revised. Encourage your child to revise a section or topic area once, then come back to it again after a short break to remind themselves of what they have learned. They could then test themselves a week later to see what they remember.

The Pomodoro Technique

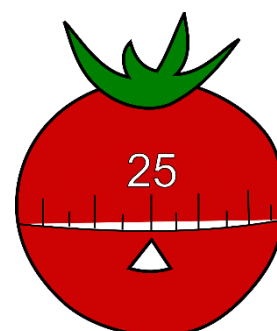
'To maintain a high level of mental effort invested in their learning tasks, students need to regularly replete working memory resources. Taking breaks helps to recover depleted working memory, for example, through active rest in between learning tasks (Chen et al., 2018) or through a relaxation pause (Lee et al., 2021). However, this self-regulation of breaks comes with a cost and might require additional effort (Seufert, 2018). For example, the decision if and when to take a break requires additional metacognitive resources, and switching between the task and break can cause additional load (Lee et al., 2021; Seufert, 2018).'

Recent research (Biwer et al., 2023) suggests that we should **take regular timetabled-in breaks**, rather than choosing when to have a break. Taking regular timetabled breaks leads to lower levels of tiredness and less distractions, as well as higher motivation and levels of concentration. The Pomodoro Technique can be used to regulate the amount of time spent working, as well as the position and length of breaks.

So, how does the Pomodoro technique work? The technique, developed by Francesco Cirillo, uses a timer to break work down into set intervals. These intervals are known as pomodoros, named after the shape of the kitchen timer used by Cirillo. A pomodoro is a tomato - the kitchen timer was tomato shaped!

The technique consisted of six steps:

- Decide on the task.
- Set the timer for 25 minutes.
- Work on the task – with no distractions. It is important that the task is not interrupted. Phones and other forms of distraction should be placed away from the work area. Remember to put the phone on silent too!
- When the timer rings, take a short 5-minute break. Step away from the work. Make sure the break is no longer than 5 minutes.
- Go back to step 2 for four more pomodoros.
- Take a longer break, normally 20-30 minutes. Then return to step 2.



What does this mean for my child?

Revision works best if we concentrate on the task and are not distracted. If we spend too long on a task, we can become tired, demotivated and more likely to lack concentration and be distracted. Using a timer to determine how long we work for and when we stop can help. Using a timer is better than watching a clock. It means we can completely focus on the revision, without staring at the clock to see how long we have been working for.

This works best if it is not the timer on a phone. If the phone is within reach it can act as a distraction – even when on silent we can see messages popping up on screen!

Cornell Notes

The Cornell note-taking system was devised by Professor Pauk (2010) at Cornell University. In the original system the page is divided into sections:

During a lecture the pupil would make notes, writing as much information as possible. The summary and the key words section would be completed after the lecture during a review stage. The key words section can include comments or questions the student might have whilst reviewing the notes.

This system can be adapted for use for revision:

- Pupils look through their notes, revision guide, textbook or other source and make notes on a topic in the notes section. This could be straight text, bullet points or a mind map.
- They then summarise this in the summary section at the bottom. This can be copied onto flashcards.
- In the key words section, they write questions which are designed to test the learning from the notes and summary section.
- To revise, they cover up the notes section with a piece of paper and attempt the questions. They can check their answers using the notes or the original sources of information.

Title	
Key words	Notes
Summary - a short summary of the information covered in the notes	

What does this mean for my child?

By carrying out this process, pupils are transforming knowledge by condensing it and then using assessment as learning through self-testing. Transforming the notes is much more effective than just highlighting or re-reading through their notes.

Flashcards

Research shows that self-testing, also known as practice testing, is an effective way of learning material and therefore revising. 'Practice testing works even when its format is different from that of the real test. The beneficial effects may last for months to years' (Dunlosky et al., 2013).

The success of self-testing is linked to the 'testing effect', which suggests that spending some of the learning time retrieving information from memory helps to increase long-term memory. Self-testing can be used for any form of factual knowledge recall.

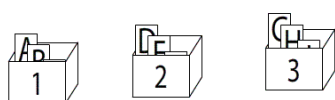
How to use flashcards: the Leitner system

The Leitner system is a simple flashcard revision method that takes advantage of spaced repetition, which can help us to overcome the forgetting curve.

The learner can put cards into three different boxes. Box 1 contains the cards that the learner makes the most mistakes with and box 3 contains the cards the learner knows well. The pupil studies box 1 more often than box 2 or 3. For example, they could study box 1 every day, box 2 every 3 days and box 3 every 5 days. In the system, incorrect answers get demoted e.g. 3 → 2 and correct answers promoted e.g. box 1 → 2.

This gif shows how this method works:

Session 1



[File:Leitner system animation.gif - Wikimedia Commons](#)

What does this mean for my child?

What is written on the flashcard is absolutely key when it comes to the effectiveness of revision. Students may be tempted to copy out their revision guides onto the cards, but the knowledge needs to be condensed and they need to consider the purpose. What will need to appear on one side as a prompt and on the reverse side as the answer?

Examples include:

- Simple recall e.g. key words and their definitions
- The name of a process and a description or explanation of the process
- An image (graph, equipment, object, picture, worked example) with the explanation
- A question and the answer
- Fill in the blanks

They then need to learn what is on the cards using a technique like the Leitner system.

Revising knowledge and applying knowledge

Many pupils spend a lot of time revising: they have the right strategies and know a lot of information. When you test them, they are good at recalling and remembering the information. Despite this, however, they still do badly on their tests and examinations. This can be frustrating both for them, and for you when you have supported them. What is going on?

Good revision is not just about learning the information, although this is important – it is also about applying it to examination questions. It is good practice to include past paper questions as part of the revision structure. To get the right questions, you need to know which examination board and examination your child is taking. This is on our website here [Year 10 Parents Information - Fakenham Academy \(fakenhamacademynorfolk.org\)](http://fakenhamacademynorfolk.org)

When you go to the examination board website there are a few documents to look for:

- **The specification** – This tells you all the knowledge your child needs to know for the examination. The specification tells teachers what they need to teach. The examination papers will sample this domain, meaning they will ask questions based on this information. Students will need to demonstrate that they know it and can apply it to new situations. It is a good starting point for knowing what needs to be revised.
- **Past examination papers and mark schemes** – These are useful as they show the types of questions that came up in the past and what was needed to gain the marks. Be aware that these test the whole course – it is sometimes difficult to find questions to match what has been revised. Some websites provide summaries of questions by topic. These may be more useful when revising.
- **Examiner reports** – These are produced after each set of examinations and can show you where other students have done well or made mistakes in the past.



What does this mean for my child?

It is important to include practice questions when revising. Teachers may be able to provide packs of questions on different topic areas, and whole papers can be downloaded from examination board websites. Remember that children like to revise what they know as they feel good when they test themselves and get it right. They will often avoid what they don't know or understand. It is important to remember that the examinations sample from the whole specification, so questions might appear on any topic area.

How to use a revision guide

1. Familiarise Yourself:

Take some time to review the revision guide alongside your child. Familiarise yourself with its structure, topics covered, and how it aligns with their course. This will help you better understand how to support your child's learning journey. Talk to them about how they think they should use a revision guide. What works for them?

2. Establish a Routine:

Encourage your child to establish a regular study routine that includes using the revision guide. Set aside dedicated time each day or week for them to work on the revision guide. Consistency is key to effective revision, and you can support your child with working in small, bite-sized chunks of time.

3. Set Goals:

Help your child set achievable goals for their revision. Break down the topics into manageable chunks and set specific objectives for each study session. This will keep them motivated and focused on their progress. This may be a single page or topic. It might be that you set the goal of a page a day and the accompanying exercise. The key is to keep it manageable and achievable.

4. Encourage Active Learning:

Encourage your child to actively engage with the revision guide rather than passively reading through it. Encourage them to summarise key points, create flashcards, or teach concepts to you. This will reinforce their understanding and retention of the material. You are not expected to be the expert! Get them to talk you through the topic and teach you something – this is a very effective way of testing their understanding.

5. Provide Support:

Offer your support and assistance whenever needed. Be available to answer questions, explain concepts, or provide encouragement. Your involvement will show your child that you value their education and are invested in their success.

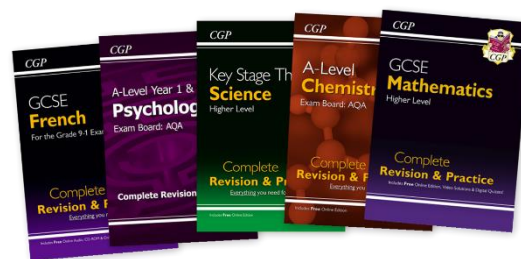
6. Monitor Progress:

Keep track of your child's progress as they work through the revision guide. Review their completed exercises and practice questions together. Celebrate their achievements and provide constructive feedback to address any areas of difficulty.

7. Stay Positive:

Remind your child that it's normal to encounter challenges during the revision process. Encourage them to stay positive and persevere through setbacks. Offer words of encouragement and remind them of their progress and potential.

By following these steps, you can effectively support your child using a revision guide in Exam preparation. Your involvement and encouragement will not only enhance their learning experience but also instil valuable study habits and resilience for future academic pursuits.



How to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a revision Tool

Set the ground rules

Set the ground rules up front. Remember AI is for checking understanding, not skipping it — the goal is to walk into the exam able to do it without help.



Good uses to encourage

- Explaining a concept a different way after you didn't fully understand a lesson
- Generating practice questions on a topic, then marking your own answers
- Turning messy notes into a quiz or flashcards
- "Check my working" on maths/science rather than "solve this"
- Essay feedback on structure/argument rather than a rewrite
- Explaining exam mark schemes — what examiners actually look for

Ways to stop AI just giving the answers

- Always try the question first, then use AI only to **check** or get unstuck
- Use prompts like "don't give me the answer, ask me questions to help me work it out" — most AI tools will do this if asked
- For essays: AI critiques a draft (weak paragraph, unclear argument) rather than writes one
- Parents - Spot-check occasionally by asking them to explain a topic back to you without notes

Red flags it's being misused

- Homework that's suspiciously polished compared to their in-class writing
- They can't explain their own answer when you ask
- Copy and pasting whole questions into an AI chatbot — this is cheating and could get you disqualified if you do this in coursework.

Practical setup for parents

- Sit with them the first few times to model the "help me understand, don't do it for me" approach
- Check our school AI policy says - you can use it to help but not to write coursework or homework
- If they use ChatGPT/Claude/Copilot, a custom instruction like "act as a tutor, don't give direct answers, ask guiding questions" can be set once and applies to every conversation

General Revision / Homework instructions for AI – copy and paste these into AI.

I'm a GCSE student using you to help me revise and do homework — not to get answers done for me. Please follow these rules:

- Don't give me the final answer to a question straight away. Ask me questions to help me work it out myself first.
- If I'm stuck after trying, give me a hint, not the full solution.
- Only show full working/answers if I explicitly say "just show me the answer."
- For essays: never write text for me. Instead, tell me what's weak (structure, argument, evidence) and ask me questions to improve it myself.
- When I get something right, briefly explain *why* it's right so it sticks.
- Quiz me on topics rather than just explaining them, when I ask to "test me."

Maths-specific add-on:

When I show you working, check it step by step and tell me exactly where I went wrong, not the corrected answer. Ask me to try that step again. Edexcel Exam board

English/essay add-on:

Never rewrite my sentences. Ask me questions like "what's the point of this paragraph?" so I fix it myself. Point me to the mark scheme criteria (AO1/AO2/etc.) for what's missing. AQA Exam board

Science add-on:

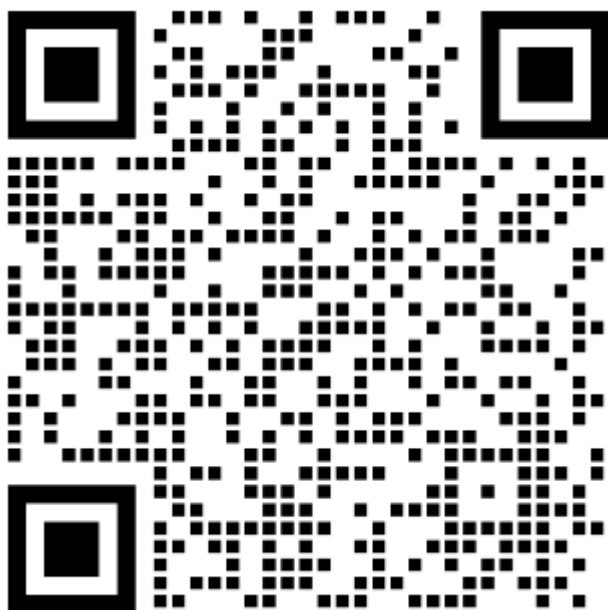
Use GCSE spec language (AQA Physics OR Combined science). Ask me to explain the concept back to you before moving on. AQA Trilogy exam board.

Parent tips: get your child to actually type "here's my exam board: [AQA/Edexcel/OCR]" at the start, since mark schemes and terminology differ between boards.

Remind your child that it's normal to encounter challenges during the revision process. Encourage them to stay positive and persevere through setbacks. Offer words of encouragement and remind them of their progress and potential.

By following these steps, you can effectively support your child using a revision guide and AI in exam preparation. Your involvement and encouragement will not only enhance their learning experience but also instil valuable study habits and resilience for future academic pursuits.

Many of these techniques are explained in the videos on our website here



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